Alameda County Lead Poisoning Prevention Program

1992 - 2012

Program History Overview

Lead is one of the most toxic poisons in our homes and environment. It causes irreparable brain damage, developmental delays and other serious health problems. Lead poisoning is also the number one completely preventable environmental health problem in the nation.

Over the last 20 years the Alameda County Lead Poisoning Prevention Program has taken a unique, comprehensive, and award winning approach to reduce lead poisoning in Alameda County.

The Problem of Lead Poisoning Over the Last 20 years

Before 1992 in Alameda County very few children were being screened for lead and only those who exhibited serious signs of lead poisoning received any follow-up. There were no services to warn families about lead, and nothing to help families find and reduce the sources of their child's poisoning.

In the rare cases where lead poisoning was identified, an individualized behavioral approach was taken; the mother was often advised to discipline the child from eating paint. Often the mother and child were blamed for the lead poisoning, rather than the fact that there was lead in their environment.

We now know that most children are lead poisoned from tiny particles of lead dust.

A wealth of research studies have shown how dangerous lead is in very small quantities in the blood. Prior to 1970, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) considered a child with 60 µg/dL of lead in their blood to be lead poisoned. The level at which a child may be harmed by lead has decreased over the years as the potency of lead has been studied and it's detrimental health effects documented over time. In 1985 the CDC lowered the definition of lead poisoning to 25 µg/dL. In 1991 the "level of concern" was again lowered even further to 10 µg/dL. It is now recognized that NO level of lead exposure is safe.

What blood lead level blood has the CDC considered harmful?

Prior to 1971	≥ 60 µg/dL
1971	≥ 40 µg/dL
1978	≥ 30 µg/dL
1985	≥ 25 µg/dL
1991	≥ 10 µg/dL
2012	**≥ 5 µg/dL** is the reference level. **No level of lead is safe**

The National Response

During this time, lead poisoning was finally beginning to be recognized as a national problem warranting a pro-active approach to prevent children from being poisoned, rather than a reactive approach *after* a child was poisoned.

In 1992, Congress passed Title X of the Housing and Community Development Act. In order to address lead-based paint hazards and reduce the risk of exposures, Title X required HUD, EPA and OSHA to promulgate new standards and rules to protect the public, workers, and the environment from lead. Congress also allocated funds for local agencies to conduct lead abatement activities in houses with low-income families.

Due to the passage of Title X, and subsequent Federal and State laws, government agencies have taken regulatory steps to make advances in the identification and control lead hazards. Some of these advances over the last 20 years include:

- Clinics receiving federal funds such as Medi-Cal, must screen children for lead
- Insurance companies must pay for blood lead screening
- Laboratories must now report all blood lead levels to the Lead Poisoning Prevention Program
- Lead hazards, and acceptable methods of testing for lead, are now clearly defined
- Training and certification programs for environmental risk assessors, project designers and contractors doing lead work are now established
- Landlords and sellers must provide a lead warning statement with an educational booklet, and disclose any known lead hazards, to potential tenants and buyers
- Employers must now protect workers from lead exposures
- Housing receiving Federal assistance must now be lead-safe
- Unsafe methods of removing lead-based paint are prohibited
- Contractors, remodelers, painters, handymen, landlords and other workers must receive training, tell property owners and occupants about lead, and use lead-safe work practices during any project that disturbs pre-1978 painted surfaces.

The Local Response

In 1987, the California Department of Health Services conducted a lead poisoning study in Oakland, Los Angeles and Sacramento. The study found that one in five of children tested for lead in the flatlands of Oakland had lead poisoning. It also found that most of our housing had high levels of lead in the paint and much of our soil is contaminated with lead.

In response to the study, People United for a Better Oakland (PUEBLO) launched a community education and advocacy campaign. They held a series of “Community Lead Action and Information

Meetings", filed a class action suit to enforce the lead testing requirement in the state Child Health and Disability Prevention (CHDP) Program, and met with public health, environmental health, housing and political leaders to demand formation of a County Lead Abatement Program. Due to PUEBLO's advocacy efforts, the County Health Officer formed a task force composed of city, county and state public health professionals, pediatricians, community groups, and housing officials. The task force proposed the development of a unique new multi-disciplinary agency to take concrete action to address the health and housing needs of children at risk of lead poisoning.

In 1991, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution officially establishing the Alameda County Lead Abatement Program. The resolution allowed cities in the County to participate in the Program by assessing an annual $10 fee on all residential dwellings constructed before 1978 (the year that lead was banned in paint.) The cities of Oakland, Berkeley, and Alameda were the first to participate in the program and the city of Emeryville joined in 1992. The program is governed by the Joint Powers Authority (JPA) which is composed of elected officials from each participating city, the County of Alameda and a community representative.

The Alameda County Lead Abatement Program became the agency responsible for the case management of all lead poisoned children in Alameda County. Case management includes sending a public health nurse and an environmental health specialist to the home to identify the source of lead, and following up with the property owner to remediate the lead hazards. In addition to case management, the Program also began conducting community and medical provider outreach and education, supported by funds from the State Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Branch.

The Lead Program was also one of the first in the nation to become an accredited lead-in-construction training provider, and to receive a lead hazard control grant from HUD to assist property owners in cleaning up lead hazards. The Program has now been awarded and successfully completed seven rounds of HUD lead hazard control grants and is in the process of implementing it's eighth.

The local lead abatement property fee allowed the Program to provide services to owners of pre-1978 residential properties including in-home consultations, training and technical assistance to reduce lead hazards in the home.

Due to the comprehensive nature of the Program, the JPA subsequently changed the Program's name to the *Alameda County Lead Poisoning Prevention Program* (ACLPPP) to reflect the full breadth of its mission.

Partnerships and collaborations with a wide range of community organizations, health care providers, housing agencies, environmental services, children's advocacy groups and governmental agencies have been a key feature of the ACLPPP from the start and an important reason for the success it has achieved. For a list of partners go to www.aclppp.org/aboutus.htm

The Move to Healthy Housing

From the start, the ACLPPP has demonstrated the importance and effectiveness of addressing housing conditions in order to improve the health of families. It soon became clear that many clients had multiple housing conditions that affected their health; pests, mold, and ventilation issues causing asthma triggers, a lack of fire and carbon monoxide detectors, and safety hazards causing injuries.

The ACLPPP was a step ahead of a national trend to recognize the importance of a multi-faceted approach to making homes healthy places for people to live. The Program began integrating healthy homes messages into it's education and outreach, and training public health home visitors, housing program staff and others in the principles of a healthy home.

In 2002 the ACLPPP received a Healthy Homes grant from HUD to conduct education and housing repairs in homes of children with asthma. The Program has continued to integrate healthy housing messages into it's services, work with community partners and is now in it's third Healthy Homes grant project. The program Director updated the mission of the Program to reflect the growth of the Program:

Our mission is to prevent lead poisoning and to promote health and safety in the home.

Accomplishments

In the 20 years from 1992 to 2012 the ACLPPP has:

- Reviewed blood lead screening results for over 200,000 children
- Cared for over 2000 lead poisoned children
- Remediated lead hazards in over 1750 homes
- Trained over 1500 individuals in lead safe work practices
- Conducted healthy housing intervention in over 600 homes

The Alameda County Lead Poisoning Prevention Program has become known nation-wide for it's innovation, leadership, and expertise in the field of lead poisoning prevention and healthy housing. With the CDC announcement this year that even lower levels of lead in children's blood can cause harm we still have much work to do, and we now know that an integrated approach to improving housing conditions is key to improving the health of our residents.

ALAMEDA COUNTY
Lead Poisoning Prevention Program
www.aclppp.org • 510-567-8280